NEW PUBLICATIONS.

BYRON.

THE REAL LORD BYRON. New Views of the Poet's Life. By JOHN CORDY JEAFFRESON. 8vo. pp. —. J. R. Osgood & Co.

Eighteen years hence, as the author of the book reminds us, the world will have in the memoir left by John Cam Hobhouse (Lord Broughton) the proofs of its writer's statements once publicly made in defence of his life-long friend, Lord Byron. Mr. Jeaffreson is unwilling that while this evidence is still sealed away in darkness mankind should continue to entertain perverted opinions concerning the much-abused poet. He has therefore prepared, in order to fill this gap, a bulky volume which aims to do justice to Byron, while it exhibits him at his worst, and which contains a great many frank statements about his contemporaries. Mr. Jeaffreson contradicts various curious or cruel misrepresentations of Byron's life, but he has, after all, been forced to paint a portrait which sorely needs the subdued light thrown by his reminder that his subject must be judged not by modern notions of propriety but with due reference to the views and manners of English society in Byron's time. Whatever his success as a romantic champion may be, it must be said that Mr. Jeaffreson takes rank as an excellent book-maker. His study of Byron is, with some exceptions, well written, lively and interesting in a high degree. It is, of course, from its very nature a gossipping book, and its occasional failures of taste in style and matter are necessarily a part of its character. It will not in some essentials change the popular opinion in regard to Byron, but it will certainly not go unread by either his detractors or his admirers.

In looking back over the record of the poet's life it is difficult to see how with his mental and physical inheritances, his early training, and the spirit of his time, he could have avoided the evils into which he fell. His father was a Sir Harry Wildair; his mother a vulgar, uneducated and silly woman, whose frightful temper wrought perdition for him in his very babyhood. He inherited qualities that cursed his genius; but he was far from being the utterly abandoned monster that Philistine England once loved to think him. Mr. Jeaffreson notes these specimens of the minor fictions that in the poet's adversity gained currency:

What marvellous stuff has been written of the stern and cruel spirit of the misanthrope, who, with the sensibility and impulsiveness of the gentler sex, could not in his softer moments see misery without weeping over it and seeking to relieve it! Who has not been invited to ponder on the habitual melancholy of the man, who in his brighter time brimmed over with frolic, and even in the sadness of his closing years made the world ring with laughter, and delighted in practical jokes? Who has not heard of his gloomy brow, black locks, dark eyes and club-foot? And yet his face was not more remarkable for the beauty of its features than for the brightness of its smiles; his hair, light chestnut in childhood, never darkened to the deepest brown of auburn; his eyes were gray-blue; and he hadn't a club-foot.

One of the fictions is that, valuing himself inordinately on his birth, he was less proud of the genius that gave us "Childe Harold" and "Don Juan," than of the accidents that made him a Lord of the Upper House. Due in some measure to the biographers, who, like Leigh Hunt and Tom Moore, could never lose sight of his patrician quality, this misconception of a nature, innocent of all such miserable weakness, is referable chiefly and in an equal degree to the simplicity and obsequiousness of the many readers, who would have honored him for being an insignificant peer, even if they had not reverenced him for being a great poet. . . . With the single exception of Lord Clare, Byron's closest comrades were found in ranks something or greatly beneath his own.

There were times, doubtless, when Hobhouse was justified in thinking his friend gave too ready an ear to flatterers whom he should have kept at a distance. But there never was a time of his whole career when the particular insolence that biographers are pleased to call "pride of race" precluded Byron from sympathizing cordially with his social inferiors. Though they were gentlemen by birth, culture, taste and purpose, Hobhouse, Hodgson, Scrope Davies, Charles Skinner Matthews and the other members of his particular set at Trinity were not the persons to whom he would have attached himself had he rated his descent at more than its proper worth. The pleasant terms on which he lived during his Cambridge vacations with the Bechers, the Pigots and the other modest gentry of a small provincial town, are evidence that the youthful peer was not so largely animated by a sense of his patrician magnificence as some of his biographers would have us believe. In later time this aristocrat, with all his overweening arrogance, took for his peculiar intimate the son of a Dublin tradesman.

Possibly his arms were set in Italy over his bed, in the manner described by Mr. Leigh Hunt who records the unimportant fact in the spirit of a discharged valet. Fifty years since beds of state were often so adorned in England, as well as Italy, just as spoons, and hall-chairs, and carriage-panels are still ornamented in like manner by owners who have not gone crazy with ancestral insolence. Though Hunt's malice inspires him to reproduce a piquant story of the anger with which Byron returned a box of pills to an apothecary because the packet was directed to "Mr." instead of "Lord" Byron, the malice of 500 detractors would induce no discriminating reader to believe so egregious and manifest a fabrication. If family pride had been inordinately strong in Byron, he would not have sold Newstead for the sake of adding a few hundreds yearly to an already sufficient income.

As to the fiction which attributed to Byron that most distressing deformity, a club-foot, Mr. Jeaffreson chronicles the fact that his lameness was due not to such a cause at all, but to the contraction of the tendon Achilles of each foot, which prevented him from putting his heels to the ground and forced him to walk on the balls and toes of his feet. "Both feet may have been equally well formed save in this sinew till one of them was subjected to injudicious surgery. . . . The right tendon, however, was so much contracted that the poet was never able to put the foot flat upon the ground; always using for it a boot made with a high heel and fitted with a padding inside under the heel of the foot. This foot was also considerably distorted, so as to turn inwards, a malformation that may have been caused altogether by the violence with which the foot was treated by the less intelligent of the boy's surgical operators." The impossibility of taking healthful exercise was the cause of a most unbeautiful corpulence. "The boy who was led in his fourteenth year to Dr. Drury's presence by Mr. Hanson (the young gentleman's solicitor) was a decidedly plump youth. To the dissipation of romantic vision, of a certain tombstone with a handsome stripling in a recumbent posture upon the moss-grown slab, it must even be recorded that, toward the close of his school-days, the boy whom Dr. Drury governed so wisely, was a *fat* boy. The hateful epithet comes to this page from the pen of a rude writer, but it came to him through an ultra-polite writer from the lips of the charming gentlewoman Miss Pigot, of Southwell, who recalled, for Tom Moore's advantage, how the "fat, bashful boy" looked and demeaned himself on entering her mother's drawing-room when he had just finished his third year at Harrow. With cheeks encased in fat, and his hair combed straight over his forehead, the young poet looked such a perfect "gaby" that the narrator, in her girlish sauciness, actually told him so. The talk at the poet's first interview with the young lady, who was for some years his most familiar friend of the gentler sex, having turned on the character of *Gabriel Lackbrain*, in the play lately performed at Cheltenham, she responded to the formal bow he made on rising to go by saying. 'Good-by, Gaby.' To his credit it should be added that instead of blushing and looking wrathful at the sally, he acknowledged it with a bright smile and stayed for a few minutes longer, to show how well he could talk on getting the better of his shyness." While he was still at Cambridge, already a successful author and approaching his twentieth year, he resolved to rid himself of his "burdensome and disfiguring grossness." He began the regimen of starvation, Epsom salts and hot baths which he maintained for the rest of his life, and which, while it brought him to striking and unusual physical beauty and elegance, brought him also to such spiritual and intellectual straits as outrages against nature always entail. He systematically sustained life on biscuits and soda-water, and when hunger grew too intense to be bearable he indulged in feasts of potatoes, fish, rice and vinegar, which gave him agonies of indigestion. He was nearly always suffering from actual pangs of hunger, and drank laudanum and sometimes chewed tobacco to still these pains. The effect of his system was as apparent at first in his sensations as in his appearance. "Relieved of the burden of his superfluous flesh, he could walk with comparative ease and security. The body that had oppressed him was no longer unwieldy and unmanageable. Obeying his will, it filled him with delight. And what is even more noteworthy than all the other results of the regimen taken together, is that this discipline of starvation and drastic depletives quickened his brain to such a degree that the man of intellect for the first time knew himself to be something far higher than a man of mere intellect. The goads and whips of the regimen had affected the nervous system, so that he had become a man of genius. He had gone to drugs and starvation at the instigation of personal vanity. Henceforth he persisted in using them for the sake of the delights of that highest life to which they had raised him and from which he soon sunk surely and quickly without their assistance."

Mr. Jeaffreson tells the story of Byron's marriage at great length, and mentions as "one of the wildly wrong notions" about the poet that he married Miss Milbanke for her money. When he proposed to her she was not an an heiress—possessing indeed so modest a provision that several of the poet's friends thought her no fit match for him. She had expectations, but they were at that time not dazzling.

In her book of strange misconceptions and delusions, Mrs. Beecher Stowe regards Miss Milbanke as a simple maiden of high degree, who, passing her life in stately seclusion and benevolent concern for the peasantry on her father's estate, entered womanhood with no experience of the world's wickedness, and gave herself to her husband in ignorance of the sins of his youth. Having read "Childe Harold," and, like all the other ladies of the period, taken much of it as autobiography, Miss Milbanke cannot have been unaware of the difference between his former life and her own. It certainly was due to no want of frankness on his part if she did not think him much worse than he really was. Moreover, the morals of "county society" in Durham and Yorkshire at the beginning of the present century afforded a young lady of the highest quality ample opportunities for discovering there was a morality for men and a different morality for women of their degree. Instead of being shocked by "Childe Harold," she admired the poem greatly; and though she declined the poet's first offer, she was far from thinking him unfit to hold communion with a gentlewoman of her refinement. On the contrary, she refused him in so gentle and flattering a manner that he wished to be to her as a brother; and he had little difficulty in persuading her to receive letters from him and to answer them with sisterly trustfulness.

Perhaps it will surprise Mrs. Stowe to learn that Miss Milbanke's views of English life and character were not taken altogether from the habits of the Durham gentry and the manners of the poor on her father's estate. Though she was not so considerable a personage as her sister-in-law of Melbourne House, Lady Milbanke had her place in London society and came to town for the season; and her only daughter saw as much of people of letters, art and science, if not of people of the highest fashion, as her cousins, the Lambs. Lady Milbanke's parties were in good repute; and when she received her acquaintance, which was often, the visitor found people of mark in her drawing-rooms. Mrs. Siddons, Joanna Baillie, and Maria Edgeworth, were her familiar friends. If she had not been Lady Melbourne's niece, Miss Milbanke would have heard all about Lord Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb, his doings and his worshippers, from her mother's guests, when all London was talking of the new poet and of the pains people were taking to make him a foolish one. Being Lady Melbourne's niece, Miss Milbanke, a young woman of abundant intelligence, knew well enough why her aunt was so desirous of seeing her Lady Byron.

Without being beautiful, Miss Milbanke was by no means unattractive to those who were not repelled by her formality and coldness. Simple, unaffected, and more likely to think too much than too little of her dignity, she had the air of natural refinement rather than of fashion. Her presence would have gained greatly in effectiveness by two or even three more inches in stature, but "her figure" (to use Byron's own words) "was perfect for her height." Though her countenance was remarkable for the roundness, which suggested to Byron the pet-name of "Pippin" for her, it had a piquant and sometimes slyly humorous expression. If they were wanting in regularity, her features were delicate, feminine and intellectual. There was nothing in her face to indicate harshness of nature, unless it was the placid severity it could wear to those who were distasteful to her. She was known to be clever, and well-read, so far as the reading of gentlewomen went in the days of the blue-stockings. Campbell went much too far when he said that her poetry would endure comparison with her husband's. Her best verses just missed the goodness that would have qualified them to be compared with his worst verses. Two of the minor poems, however, of Mr. Murray's complete edition of Byron's works, were certainly of her writing. At the same time her slightest and most trivial essays in poetical composition were superior to the average poetry of the "Keepsakes" and other fashionable collections of "*Vers de Société*!"

In their ignorance of Byron, people have wondered how a woman more remarkable for composure than loveliness attracted Byron's attention, and in their misinformation respecting her pecuniary worth they have escaped from the difficulty by assuming he was drawn to her by her money. In his knowledge of the poet Harness suggested shrewdly that her coldness had a charm for him; and there is sure evidence that the suggestion was in a degree a true one. From his knowledge of himself Byron knew that an air of reserve and even of frigidity to comparative strangers did not necessarily indicate coldness of heart. He was precisely the man to be piqued by coldness to curiosity about its cause and a desire to overcome it. Lady Caroline Lamb began in the right way when she "turned on her heel"; two days afterward he asked for the reason of her conduct, and the next day he called upon her and made love to her. But though she was clever enough to see the right course, Lady Caroline Lamb had not self-control and strength enough to persist in it. . . .

Whilst his fair idolaters suffocated and sickened him (to a degree Lady Caroline little imagined) with their insane worship, Miss Milbanke was one of the few women to talk to him of his poetry in a way showing they could appreciate it. But her respect for his art was curiously devoid of enthusiasm for the artist. She liked to talk with him of poetry, and showed him specimens of her own verse. But she respected poetry too much to fall at the poet's feet; she respected herself too much to become one of the apes who tried to imitate his feeling and manner. The young man, who plumed himself on his superiority to the herd, naturally honored the woman who showed herself superior to the mob of fashionable womankind. And as he grew more and more weary of the fantastic caprices and hysterical vehemence of the silly woman of fashion, he was more and more attracted by the composure and tranquil intellect of the clever woman of no fashion.

That "The Dream" has no autobiographical value except as evidence of the way in which the poet was pleased to regard certain passages of his life eighteen months after his wedding is the conviction of Mr. Jeaffreson. He tells the story of the wedding-morning, noting that there was "no lady's-maid in the carriage sitting 'bodkin' between the bride and bridegroom; though Byron, no doubt, said to Medwin at Pisa, in 1821, 'After the ordeal was over, we set off for a country seat of Sir Ralph's; and I was surprised at the arrangements for the journey, and somewhat out of humor to find a lady's-maid stuck between me and my bride. It was rather too early to assume the husband; so I was forced to submit, but it was not with a very good grace. Put yourself in a similar situation, and tell me if I had not some reason to be in the sulks. I have been accused of saying, on getting out of the carriage, that I had married Lady Byron out of spite, and because she had refused me twice. Though I was vexed at her prudery, or whatever you may choose to call it, if I had made so uncavalier, not to say brutal, a speech, I am convinced Lady Byron would instantly have left the carriage to me and the maid (I mean the lady's). She had spirit enough to have done so, and would properly have resented the affront.' On reading this piece of literature in Medwin's book, Hobhouse exclaimed fiercely, that Medwin was an infamous impostor. He had himself handed Lady Byron into the carriage, and could swear there was no maid in it! And Hobhouse was not mistaken on the point of fact. But he was wrong in thinking Tom Medwin an impostor. How did this invention come into Tom's book? How came Byron to put it there?"

When he spoke to his especially confidential friends of Byron's most serious faults, Hobhouse used to put high in the list the poet's readiness to gossip with sycophants about his private affairs, a failing which, though it had a show of amiability, was in truth a most hurtful weakness. Whilst the habit fed the selfishness, which (according to Hobhouse) was Byron's worst and most deplorable characteristic, it was prolific of absurd stories that darkened the poet's fame. To Hobhouse it seemed that Tom Medwin was one of the sycophants who, by humoring Byron's vanity, led him to talk loosely; and an impostor who deliberately vamped up the poet's imprudent statements with bits of fiction, so as to impose the gossip more readily on the public.

But Shelley's familiar connection and school-mate—poor Tom Medwin, whilom of the 24th Light Dragoons, and, in 1821, and the two following years, living in Italy on insufficient means—was neither knave nor toady. A man of gentlemanly address and puerile simplicity, he was a good-tempered fool. If he had disliked this relative and hanger-on of the Shelleys, Byron—living in close intimacy with Shelley—could not have treated him with open rudeness. But Byron had a tenderness for the young man, who was just then no less unfortunate than unwise. Warned by Trelawny that this inquisitive prattler was taking notes with a view to printing them, Byron answered lightly, "So many lies are told about me that Medwin won't be believed." And having said thus much and a little more to Trelawny, Byron took care that Medwin should not be believed,—took care that the "notes" should comprise so large a proportion of obvious fictions, that cautious readers would not know what of their statements they might believe,—would be doubtful whether they contained a single pure and unadulterated fact. In a word, Byron "bammed" Medwin,; and Medwin was a very easy man to "bam!"

"To bam" was to hoax with a humorous fiction. The old slang word "bam" meant a story which none but a simpleton would believe. It occurs in "Sam Hall," the convict's ditty that used to be encored loudly in the Cave of Harmony, when Arthur Pendennis was a young man.—

"The parson, he did come, he did come,
And talk of 'kingdom come;'
But then it was all bam!"

In the days when Kit North's friends wrote their convivial articles for "Blackwood" over their tumblers, and sometimes under them, a reference to the art of "bamming" was often seen in the columns of that polite magazine. At the same time the Prince Regent, a consummate master of the elegant art, made "bamming" a favorite pastime with the gentlemen of his *entourage*. When George the Fourth entertained a dinner-table by describing gravely how he commanded-in-chief at Waterloo, he was not mad or tipsy; he was telling a "bam" for the fun of seeing how it would be received by one of his guests, the Duke of Wellington. "Bamming" was "lying with a difference." It was necessary for a "bam" to be humorous; it might not be uttered for the teller's pecuniary benefit or for his material advantage in any way; it was needful for it to be so egregiously absurd that no one but a dullard would believe it. Byron's story about the lady's maid was all "bam." Medwin having swallowed the invention, and gravely put it away for use, it is not wonderful that Byron found him a diverting companion in idle hours. . . .

Annoyances and humiliations from want of money notwithstanding, the young husband and wife lived as young married folk should for four and even five months in the Duchess of Devon's house without quarrelling or even bickering. In society Byron played the part of an idolizing and triumphant husband; at home he found in Lady Byron a thoughtful and sympathetic wife, who, throwing herself into his literary interests, was delighted to act as his amanuensis and secretary; her service in this respect being of great convenience to the poet, who wrote a poor hand, and on his nervous days disliked the drudgery of penmanship. During these months she wrote several small poems, some of which he corrected, very much, of course, to their improvement.

This was the time when he was habitually so cheerful and sometimes so hilarious in her society that he was surprised to find her of the same opinion as those who regarded him as the victim of deep and incurable melancholy. He had been more than usually gay and brilliant in society, when his wife declared her pleasure at seeing him in such high spirits. "And yet, Bell," he said, "I have been called and miscalled melancholy, you must have seen how falsely, frequently."

"No, Byron," she answered, with the fine perception of wifely sympathy, "it is not so; at heart you are the most melancholy of mankind; and often when apparently gayest."

If Byron had been so gloomy at his wedding as "The Dream" represents, he could scarcely have been so surprised at his wife's detection of his melancholy.

It would be unfair to the reader of this most entertaining book to rehearse here Mr. Jeaffreson's explanation of the separation of Byron and his wife. He does full justice to Lady Byron, and while lifting from her husband's memory some of the more cruel aspersions to which that separation gave rise, he is far from holding the poet blameless. He points out and proves, indeed, that the chief cause of the trouble which parted them was Byron's selfishness, his grand failing. "He would concede, he would give away anything except the one thing on which he had for the moment set his heart; but as soon as any one denied him that one thing, or tried to take it from his hands, the selfishness overpowered every generous force of his nature." The monstrous accusation which Lady Byron made against her husband in her later years, and which Mrs. Stowe so unwisely published, Mr. Jeaffreson thus explains:

When the deed of separation had been signed, Byron declared that from the commencement of the domestic troubles, although Augusta had been his companion for weeks, he had never heard her speak or known her write a single unkind word of his wife. In truth, Augusta's courageous devotion to her sister-in-law seemed to strengthen, and gain strength from, her generous devotion to her brother. And Lady Byron was fully informed of Augusta's loyalty to her in her absence, and deeply grateful to her for it. Throughout the eight wretched years that intervened between the separation and Byron's death the relations of the two sisters-in-law underwent no diminution of cordiality. . . .

The last five years had been years of unutterable trial, scorching humiliation, and probably of gnawing remorse to Lady Byron, who in every indication of the change of sentiment for the poet, and every proof of the growing admiration of his genius, saw a sign of the increasing disrespect in which she was held—or at least felt herself to be held. It was small solace to her that the world forbore to upbraid her, and under utterances of condescending compassion for her sorrows, veiled the opinion that the sorrows, though severe, were no undeserved punishment. . . . Ten years since, had she told aloud the real story of her husband's offences against her, the general verdict on the case would have been in her favor. But now, the fullest statement of her case would have been received as tantamount to a confession of her conjugal impatience, selfishness and disloyalty. The time had passed for her to speak to her own advantage. Henceforth it would be for her to hold her tongue in her own interest. She would only provoke exclamations of abhorrence by an avowal that she had indeed broken away from her husband, because his petulance irritated her, because his unkind words exasperated her, and because his determination to travel, when he ought to have been content to remain in England, worried her. In charity and pity people were silent about her; and their silence was a whip of fire to her pride. And whilst mute tongues declared her condemnation, the land resounded with the praises of her sister-in-law. It was ever in the widow's mind how the glory about Augusta's brow might have dwelt upon her own head. If she had not seen the manuscript of the "Epistle to Augusta," which had been withheld from the press by Mrs. Leigh's care for her sister-in-law's peace of mind, Lady Byron knew the "Stanzas to Augusta" by heart. Lady Byron would have had a faultless temper, a flawless nature, to persist in loving Augusta to the last.

A rupture between Lady Byron and Mrs. Leigh was inevitable, provided they survived Byron for a considerable period; and the rupture took place between the latter part of November, 1829, and the latter part of February, 1830. Though they quarrelled like gentlewomen, they quarrelled bitterly. No one will be surprised to hear that they differed on a trivial matter, *i. e.*, put their quarrel on a trivial matter, distinct from the real cause of Lady Byron's soreness against her sister-in-law. . . .

While the two gentlewomen were differing on so slight an occasion for serious difference, other matters happened to aggravate Lady Byron's dislike of the sister-in-law with whom she had lived for so long a period in close intimacy and affectionate confidence. Lady Byron's quarrel with Augusta on the trivial pretext was not consummated till the latter part of February, 1830—the month in which she read with reasonable indignation Moore's "Life" of her husband.

But though she made her bitter quarrel with Augusta on the paltry dispute about the trusteeship, Moore's "Life" may be held largely accountable for the energy with which Lady Byron pushed the quarrel in its latest stages and for the bitter feeling that animated her against her sister in-law even to the grave, and beyond the grave. It is not wonderful that she was exasperated, maddened by the book which, so far as she was concerned, was the reproduction of the defamatory "Memoirs," for whose destruction so much pains had been taken, so much scandal provoked, and so much money spent—in vain, so far as her feelings were concerned. The book that clothed the unforgiving wife with ignominy glorified her sister-in-law. If Lady Byron had never seen the "Epistle to Augusta" in manuscript, she now read in type that sacred outpouring of the affection, which had been diverted from the wife, who should have earned it, to the sister who so richly deserved it.

Is it strange that the proud, nervous, too self-respecting woman abhorred Augusta, was quick to think evil of her, was eager to justify her abhorrence of her to her own conscience, was desirous of making the world share in the abhorrence? Is it strange she could persuade herself that Augusta rejoiced in the "Life," had even inspired much of the book, which was designed to make Byron's wife shameful and Byron's sister glorious throughout all coming time?

What followed must be considered by the light of the fact that Lady Byron lived to detest and abominate her sister-in-law;—the Augusta toward whom Lady Byron is represented by simple, foolish Mrs. Stowe as overflowing to the last with Christian charity. It is not suggested that Lady Byron deliberately set herself to work to frame and disseminate defamatory stories of her sister-in-law, knowing the stories to be false inventions at the moment of making and divulging them. Had she been guilty of even that wickedness, human charity would not be without excuses for the miserable woman, groaning under a burden of shame too heavy, writhing under torture too acute for her powers of endurance. But it is far more probable—indeed it may be taken for certain, in so far as such an hypothesis may be dealt with as a certainty—that Lady Byron (a rightly meaning, though often a very wrongly feeling woman, to the last; a woman sincerely set on being good and doing good) believed everything she said to her sister-in-law's discredit; believed the monstrous and absolutely false tale she told to Mrs. Beecher Stowe, and (with divers variations) to so many other people, that there is no ground for questioning substantial accuracy of Mrs. Stowe's record of the communications made to her.

It is the fashion of many persons to speak of Lady Byron as the victim in her later years of monomania on this subject; but the word in no fair way represents the condition of her mind, which never was mad or unsettled or disordered in such a manner as to justify a writer in rating her with sufferers from insanity. To the last she was a clear and precise observer, expressed her thoughts with lucidity, coherence and vigor. To the last she had a subtle and logical mind. By no definition of insanity that would be entertained seriously by a commissioner *de lunatico inquirendo* was she an insane person. How then did it come about that, being unquestionably sane, she could take so mad and absolutely wrong a view of her husband, whom she regarded affectionately after his death, and of the woman who had been her close and beloved friend for nearly fifteen years? It is not difficult to answer this question. At all times an assiduous reader of her husband's works, Lady Byron found a fascinating employment in discriminating between the egotistic, the sympathetic and the imaginative elements of the compositions, and in forming a conception of his character and a history of his career out of the ingredients she classified under the first head. In her well-known and often-published letter (written in 1818) to Lady Anne Barnard she wrote, "In regard to his" (Byron's) "poetry, egotism is the vital principle of his imagination, which it is difficult for him to kindle on any subject with which his own character and interests are not identified; but by the introduction of fictitious incidents, by change of scene and time, he has enveloped his poetical disclosures in a system impenetrable except to a very few, and his constant desire of creating a sensation makes him not averse to be the object of wonder and curiosity, even though accompanied by some dark and vague suspicions." Excellent as a precise and accurate description of Byron's poetical method, this passage is also noteworthy as an illustration of the pleasure Lady Byron found in examining her husband's works, line by line, in a detective spirit—of her practice of reading them in this spirit—and of her confidence that she was one of the very few capable of penetrating the subtle webs of mystification, under which the poet veiled his egotisms, hiding himself even whilst he was in the act of revealing himself. Taught by the poet himself, as we have seen in earlier chapters of this work, to accept his poems as autobiographic confessions, the multitude took every stanza and line of his writings, from the first canto of "Childe Harold" to the latest of "Don Juan," as so much information about the adventures, experiences, habits, temper, passions, sentiments of the author himself. Readers of finer culture and nicer judgment knew that the sincere sentiments of the man were puzzlingly and inseparably intermingled with the sentimentalities of the poet and the pure inventions of the creator; and were generally of opinion that after throwing off one of these medleys of genuine feeling, playful fancy and poetical conceit, the poet himself would have been unable to say what of it was fact, what was fiction, and what was simply perverse contradiction of fact. To most of these readers of culture and discrimination it was enough to enjoy the poem without troubling themselves to inquire what of it came from the writer's heart, and what from his brain, and what from the pure waywardness of his nature, what of it came from his personal experiences, and what from the experiences of other persons. At the same time there were a few readers to whom the chief delight from a new poem by Lord Byron was the pleasure they found in dissecting it and in analyzing it, and separating the Byronic realism from the Byronic idealism of every passage. Lady Byron was one of the very few, who could penetrate all the mysteries, solve all the riddles, and explain all the perplexities of every "poetical disclosure";—one of the very few who could seize the real Lord Byron under any disguise, and never mistook for a piece of real man anything of specious show which he had used for the sake of its misleading effectiveness on the uninitiated vulgar. Reading Byron's works in this way in the second year of her separation from him, Lady Byron continued to read them in the same spirit and with the same confidence in her sagacity, in the fifth year of her widowhood—and afterward, when animosity against Augusta, impairing her critical perceptivity and disturbing her judgment, disposed her to believe any evil thing of her husband, provided her sister-in-law showed as the companion and sharer of his guilt. In these later stages of her career, the Byron, who rose to Lady Byron's view out of the misread and miserably mis-brooded-over pages of "Manfred" and "Cain," was indeed "an object of wonder and curiosity"; but instead of being the real Byron, he was a fictitious monster begotten of the reader's "dark and vague suspicions."

Let it not be imagined that Lady Byron and Mrs. Leigh never saw one another again. The present writer *believes* (on grounds which would not justify him in saying he *knows*) that, with the exception of the single occasion, to which attention will be called immediately, they never again held intercourse by word of mouth. . . . It is certain that from 1830 to 1851, Lady Byron regarded her sister-in-law with growing animosity, as a woman who had done her grievous injury. Whether it was nursed secretly (as it sometimes was) or declared to others (as it occasionally was), this dislike of the woman, whom she accused of darkening her honor and destroying her happiness, infatuated Lady Byron. It is also certain that this poisonous animosity disposed Lady Byron to conceive and believe enormous evil of her sister-in law. It is also certain that—whether it covered the whole twenty-one years since the appearance of Moore's "Life," or was an affair of shorter duration—the total estrangement of the two sisters-in-law had existed for a long period, when they had their last interview under the following remarkable circumstances:—

On a certain Tuesday morning of April, 1851, an aged lady, having the appearance of an extreme invalid, came to the London Bridge Station, and seated herself in a first-class carriage of the next train for Reigate,—the place of her destination. At a glance, it was obvious that she could never have been beautiful; must even in the spring of her youth have been plain. But the signs of sickness and sorrow in her countenance made her interesting to her fellow-travellers and won their sympathy. She was indeed a woman of sorrows, and had made acquaintance with griefs unimagined by most of her sex. Of those griefs too much has been told elsewhere. She was Byron's sister, stricken with years and illness, and within a few months of the hour when trouble and unkindness ceased to vex her.

A loiterer on the platform of the Reigate Station, waiting for the arrival of this train, would have seen amongst the persons about him a man-servant in drab livery. On the arrival of the down train, this footman bestirred himself. Taking a lady's calling-card from his pocket, he hastened to the first-class carriages, and went from carriage to carriage, holding out the card to the view of the occupants of the seats. At last he came to the carriage in which Mrs. Leigh was seated. On seeing the card with Lady Byron's name upon it, Mrs. Leigh declared herself the person he was seeking. The man said a fly was in attendance; and in another minute Mrs. Leigh was driving to the White Hart Hotel of Reigate. On leaving the carriage at the door of the inn, she was shown to a private room, where Lady Byron and the Reverend Frederick Robertson, of Trinity Chapel, Brighton, were expecting her appearance. Lady Byron, an invalid, had come from Brighton with the clergyman for an interview with her sister-in-law. During the long years that had passed since their estrangement, Augusta had often wished for friendly speech with her sister-in-law; and Lady Byron had on several occasions been in vain urged to comply with the desire. It had come to Mrs. Leigh's knowledge that she was said by Lady Byron to have been the influence that prevented the poet from coming to just and kindly views respecting his wife. There were times when Lady Byron's chief sorrow was that she and her husband had not been reconciled before his death; times when her greatest complaint against Mrs. Leigh was that the reconcilement would have taken place, had not she used her influence over her brother to perpetuate the estrangement. In fact Byron had never been more certain that Mrs. Clermont was the chief cause of the separation, than Lady Byron became at these times that but for Augusta the separation would have been of no long continuance. Byron would have come to just views about her, if Augusta had not prolonged the mischief,—this was the complaint of Byron's widow. It had been reported to Mrs. Leigh that Lady Byron was possessed by this fancy, and spoke bitterly of her for other matters. On hearing this Augusta imagined that she could disabuse her sister-in-law of this and other painful notions, if she could only get speech with her, face to face. Hence Augusta's desire for interviews which Lady Byron declined to grant. The present meeting at the White Hart Hotel was at Lady Byron's instance. The one invalid lady living at Brighton and the other in London, and each of them being too weak for the journey to and fro between London and Brighton on the same day, it had been arranged that they should meet at this half-way house. It had been also arranged that, whilst Mrs. Leigh should come to the meeting unattended, Lady Byron should come to it attended by the clergyman who was just then her most confidential spiritual adviser.

Knowing she had not long to live, and holding the old simple notion that the words of the dying are strong to convince even the most suspicious and incredulous hearers, Mrs. Leigh journeyed to Reigate, hoping that the assurance of her lips (so soon to be still forever) would relieve Lady Byron's mind of its misconceptions,—more especially of the quite groundless notions that she had been the cause of her brother's persistence in unkindly feeling toward his wife. No good came of this curious meeting, which opened with Mrs. Leigh's solemn assurance. When the assurance had been given, Lady Byron intimated in three words her surprise that her sister-in-law had nothing more to say. Mr. Robertson looked as though he were puzzled,—as though he and Lady Byron had been trifled with. What more Lady Byron and Mr. Robertson expected to hear from Mrs. Leigh does not appear. That they had come to Reigate for some larger and more momentous communication was shown to Mrs. Leigh both by their words and looks; and it distressed Mrs. Leigh greatly on and after her return to town, indeed till the end of the brief remainder of her days, to know that Mr. Robertson suspected her of refraining at the last moment from saying what she ought to have said, and what she had come there to tell them. These expressions of dissatisfaction on the part of Lady Byron and the clergyman were followed by words between the ladies, that did not make them better friends. Lady Byron directly charged Mrs. Leigh with aggravating Byron's bitterness to her, and encouraging him to remain in enmity toward her. Mrs. Leigh repelled the accusation warmly, and in support of her assertions that she had consistently and invariably done her best to be a peace-maker, quoted certain words spoken by Hobhouse,—words that agitated Lady Byron profoundly, causing her to start and change color. Of course, no good came of all this. Lady Byron returned to Brighton with a determination never again to see or hold communication with her sister-in-law. And Mrs. Leigh went back to London in grief at Lady Byron's perplexing treatment of her.

Mrs. Leigh would fain have seen Mr. Robertson again, to satisfy him by the exhibition of letters that she had spoken nothing but the truth to Lady Byron in his hearing. But as he was of opinion no good could come of the interview or from his examination of the documents, the clergyman declined to see her again on the matter, or go further into the business. It is nothing to Mrs. Leigh's discredit that Mr. Robertson regarded her with something more than suspicion; for his mind was wholly prepossessed by the representations of the other lady.

Six months later when Mrs. Leigh was on her deathbed sinking slowly, Lady Byron (then in town or at Esher) was constant in her inquiries for her sister-in-law; and some of her inquiries indicated a faint revival of her old fondness for the dying lady. She even begged that the words—Dearest Augusta—might be whispered in the dying one's ear, as coming to her in love and sympathy from her sister Byron; and this brief message was actually given to Mrs. Leigh, who acknowledged it with an exhibition of feeling that was duly reported to the poet's widow. But neither of the sisters-in-law saw the other again; and though she seems to have relented to Augusta under the shadow of approaching death, it is certain that Lady Byron's animosity against Byron's sister revived soon after the grave had closed over her. Though she often helped them with her purse, and was their fitful benefactress, Lady Byron's relations with Mrs. Leigh's children were not altogether to her credit. Sometimes they countenanced the opinion that she valued them and felt amiably to them, in proportion as she could use them as instruments for their mother's annoyance or discredit, and disregarded them in proportion as they distinguished themselves by devotedness to their much-suffering parent, or to her memory, when her sufferings had ended. Within nine months of Mrs. Leigh's death Lady Byron did her utmost to lower Augusta in the esteem of one of Augusta's more faithful and affectionate children. The animosity that made her desirous of setting the child against the dead mother was not inoperative in Lady Byron's breast, when she told evil of her dead sister-in-law to comparative strangers; when she told the hideous story to so slight an acquaintance as Mrs. Beecher Stowe, well knowing that Mrs. Stowe was a person not unlikely to communicate it to the world. But enough has been said to show that Lady Byron's animus toward her sister in-law was not (as simple Mrs. Stowe imagined) the animus of a Christian woman overflowing with charity and tenderness to one of her own sex.